

Atalanta’s night to ‘remember forever’

AFP, Milan

Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini hailed a performance his club will “remember forever” after the Italian side crushed Valencia 4-1 on Wednesday to take a giant step closer to reaching the Champions League quarterfinals for the first time.

Dutch wing-back Hans Hateboer scored twice on 16 and 62 minutes, sandwiching goals from Josip Illicic and Remo Freuler.

“This is an evening that we’ll remember forever,” said Gasperini. “It’s an amazing result, full of emotion.”

It was an extraordinary night for the side from Bergamo who travelled to the San Siro with over 40,000 of their

fans as their home stadium 55km away does not meet UEFA regulations.

Denis Cheryshev pulled one back for Valencia in the first leg of the last-16 tie at the San Siro, the same stadium where the Spanish side lost the 2001 final to Bayern Munich on penalties.

Valencia, seventh in La Liga, had finished top of their group after away wins over Ajax and Chelsea but were missing several key players through injury and suspension.

“It certainly complicates things a bit, it’s a pretty overwhelming result, this 4-1,” said Valencia coach Albert Celades. “In the end it doesn’t reflect much what we saw on the pitch.”

Atalanta’s run comes despite losing their opening three Champions League group games, before finishing

second behind Manchester City.

“Three goals ahead is a nice reward,” added Gasperini. “But there were a lot of dangerous situations, these are things we’ll need to improve in Valencia.

“We are satisfied with this victory and above all with this advantage. Yesterday I would have signed to go to Valencia in the return game with a three-goal lead.”

The tournament debutants dominated the first half with Mario Pasalic having their first chance on eight minutes, but Valencia goalkeeper Jaime Domenech pushed the ball over.

“We had opportunities and we didn’t finish them,” said Celades. “The result is clear enough today, but it’s not impossible (to turn around). Let’s see what happens at Mestalla, let’s play well in our stadium.”



Champions League debutants Atalanta showed that they were not just around to make up the numbers, thumping Valencia 4-1 at the San Siro on Wednesday, with Hans Hateboer scoring twice in the last-16 first leg.

PHOTO: ATALANTA

Pep ‘100% staying’

AFP, Manchester

Pep Guardiola insisted on Wednesday that he will stay with Manchester City and vowed that the “truth will prevail” over their shock two-year ban from European competitions.

City were banned from the Champions League and Europa League for the next two seasons UEFA found them guilty of committing “serious breaches” of financial regulations.

“If they don’t sack me I will stay here 100 percent more than ever. First because I want to stay. It’s something special, more than the contract I have,” Guardiola said after Wednesday’s 2-0 win against West Ham.

“I said before, I say now, I want to stay and help the club and maintain this level as long as possible. When I said I love this club I like to be here, why should I leave? No matter what happens I will be here next season.”



Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) was welcomed warmly by head coach Russell Domingo and spin consultant Daniel Vettori (2nd from R) as he joined the Tigers’ training camp for the Zimbabwe series for the first time yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Police hold Kings

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings received a jolt in their second match of the Bangladesh Premier League as promoted Bangladesh Police came from behind to hold them to a 1-1 draw at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

In the day’s other match, title contenders Sheikh Russel, who played out a 1-1 draw against Brothers Union in their previous match, were held to a goalless draw by Rahmatganj.

Federation Cup champions Bashundhara, who secured a hard-fought 1-0 win over Uttar Baridhara in their opening match, faced a stiff challenge from Bangladesh Police, who came into the match on the back of a 0-2 loss to Abahani.

Police started promisingly, unlike in their previous match against Abahani, and created a few opportunities in the first 20 minutes, with Bulgarian forward Laskov Antonio and American striker Riveria Sidney coming close to breaking the deadlock.

Antinio saw his free-kick was brilliantly tipped over by goalkeeper Anisur Rahman

Zico in the 17th minute before a Sidney volley narrowly missed the target.

Those served as wake-up calls for Bashundhara, who gradually took control. They went close to taking a lead in the 23rd minute after availing a fumble from Police goalkeeper Saiful Islam Khan, but Towhidul Alam Sabuz failed to muster a shot from the edge of the box with Saiful tumbling to the ground after taking a goal-kick.

Bashundhara kept pressing for the lead and came close from a goal-mouth melee, but Kyrgyz defender Aider Mambetaliev made a goal-line save from Nicolas Delmonte’s backheel in the 35th minute. Five minutes from the break, Sidney tried from the distance and missed narrowly, much to Zico’s relief.

After resumption, Sabuz failed to connect to the ball with an open net waiting but the forward made amends in the 53rd minute, tapping in a rebound from close range after goalkeeper Saiful parried Delmonte’s shot.

Police equalised when substitute MS Bablu rattled the far post and Bashundhara defender Nurul Nayeem Faisal bundled the ball into his own net from inside the six-yard box in the 73rd minute as the teams shared a point each.

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|-----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| Police | 1 | - | 1 | Kings |
| Faisal 72’ (OG) | | | | Sabuz 53’ |
| Rahmatganj | 0 | - | 0 | Sheikh Russel |

Navy clinch Shaheed Smriti Hockey title

Bangladesh Navy clinched the title of Shaheed Smriti Hockey tournament with a 6-3 win over Bangladesh Army in the final at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Studded with national players, Navy dominated the game and took a 3-1 lead in the first half with Ashraful Islam, Rasel Mahmud Jimmy and Mahbub Hossain scoring one apiece. Monoz Babu pulled one goal back for Army.

After resumption, Navy maintained their stranglehold three more goals came from Moinal Islam Koushik, Abed Uddin and Ashraful Islam before Army staged a late resistance with two goals from Milon Hossain and Nayeem Uddin.

--SPORTS REPORTER

CCCL to hold mini-marathon in March

The Cadet College Club Ltd (CCCL) is going to host a mini-marathon titled CCCL-RunBangla International 10km next March at Hatirjheel with the theme ‘towards a special future for our special children.’

1,200 people are expected to take part in marathon, which has been recognised by the international body, the Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS). The date is scheduled to be held on March 13 at 6:30am.

Interested participants have to register online with Tk 1,000 while foreign participants have to pay USD 35. A portion of the money will be disbursed to differently-abled children, speakers at a press briefing at the NSC auditorium said yesterday.

--SPORTS REPORTER

Federer out of French Open

Roger Federer has undergone surgery to resolve a longstanding knee problem and said Thursday he would be out of action until after the French Open.

The 20-time Grand Slam winner revealed on his Facebook account that he underwent surgery in Switzerland on Wednesday and would miss a string of tournaments including the May 24-June 7 French Open.

“As a result, I will miss Dubai, India

Wells, Bogota, Miami and the French Open,” he said.

“I can’t wait to be back playing again soon, see you on grass!” -- AFP

Barca sign Braithwaite

Barcelona have signed Denmark striker Martin Braithwaite from fellow La Liga side Leganes for 18 million euros after receiving permission from the league’s organising body to acquire a player outside the transfer window.

The Spanish champions paid the player’s release clause and signed him till June 2024. The 28-year-old, who scored six league goals in 21 starts for Leganes this season will be officially unveiled at the Camp Nou later on Thursday.

--REUTERS

PSG boss indicted in bribery case

PSG chief Nasser Al-Khelaifi and FIFA’s disgraced former secretary general Jerome Valcke have been indicted in Switzerland for alleged corruption in the attribution of football broadcasting rights.

The Swiss attorney general’s office said in a statement on Thursday that the two had been charged “in connection with the award of media rights to various World Cup and FIFA Confederations Cup tournaments.”

Al-Khelaifi, who is also the boss of Qatari television channel BeIN Sports, is suspected of giving inappropriate gifts to Valcke -- including rent-free access to a luxury property -- in order to secure broadcast rights to prestigious events, including the World Cup.

-- AFP

Myanmar-Kyrgyzstan game investigated for fixing

FIFA is investigating allegations Myanmar deliberately threw a 2022 World Cup qualifier match last year, the country’s football body said Thursday.

Myanmar lost the October match against Kyrgyzstan 7-0, the Southeast Asian side’s third defeat in a row.

Myanmar football writer and analyst Htun Htun Oo said he was unconvinced there had been foul play. “Losing by lots of goals comes as no surprise to Myanmar fans,” he said.

-- AFP

Went to a gunfight without bullets, Jose says after loss

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho had his excuses ready made for a 1-0 home defeat to RB Leipzig that leaves Tottenham needing to recreate their escape acts of last season to progress to the Champions League quarterfinals.

Already without Harry Kane due to a long-term hamstring injury, the news that Son Heung-min could miss the rest of the season with a fractured right arm on Tuesday was a body blow to Spurs’ chances of progressing.

“It’s like going to a gun fight without bullets, so we did what we could do,” concluded Mourinho.

As the Portuguese complained about his lack of resources, it was easy to forget that Leipzig were the novices at this stage of the competition. Tottenham progressed further in the Champions League for the past three years under Mauricio Pochettino, culminating in a rollercoaster run to last season’s final.

A similar run this season is hard to imagine with even Mourinho questioning how his side muddles through to the end of the season without their two top goalscorers.



PHOTO: TWITTER

RB Leipzig striker Timo Werner (C) continued to shine away from home, making the difference with his seventh away strike in the Champions League in a 1-0 win over Tottenham Hotspur in London yesterday.

Nat’l School Chess revived after 7 years

SPORTS REPORTER

The National School Chess championship is set to return after seven years as the Bangladesh Chess Federation (BCF) signed an MoU with Abul Khair Group yesterday to stage the championship for the next five years.

The BCF had previously staged the championships regularly with help from Standard Chartered Bank, who withdrew support after the 2013 championship due to a lack of transparency in the BCF committee. Since then, BCF has failed to rope in sponsors.

BCF general secretary Syed Shahabuddin Ahmed Shamim and Abul Kair Group executive director Shahidullah signed the agreement, which will see sponsors provide Tk 77 lakh per year for the tournament.

“We were trying to patronise school chess for a long time and we finally have a sponsor. If we can provide sustainable support to school chess for three to five years, we can produce a lot of chess players and may also get Grand Masters in the near future,” said BCF president and RAB director general Benazir Ahmed.

BCF general secretary Shamim informed that they would first organise at the district level with the participation of upazilas before two players, one each from the boy’s and girl’s section, would advance to the divisional stage. From there, five players from each division in both sections will qualify for the 80-player final round to be held in Dhaka. He added that they will soon set the date for the championship at district level.